

Veterans' Health

SUMMER • 2006

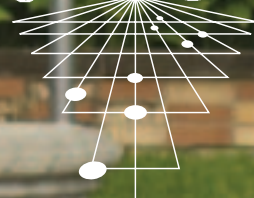
THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Helping veterans
readjust after
returning home

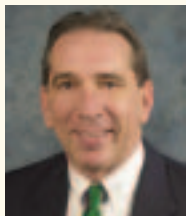
Smart
strategies
to prevent
cancer



VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers



Summer is a great time to get together with family, friends and neighbors for parades, picnics and fairs. This season of sun and fun is also a great time to do what you can to guard yourself against cancer. In this issue, we show you some important steps you can take to keep you and your loved ones healthy, including quitting smoking, eating healthy, exercising regularly and wearing sunscreen (see pages 4–7).

We're also working on a new initiative to help returning OIF/OEF veterans transition into civilian life. On page 3, Col. Terry Washam explains the new Post-Deployment Health Reassessment procedures, which are aimed at helping veterans head off future physical and emotional health trouble.

For more information about what's going on at VA Healthcare System of Ohio, visit our Web site, www.va.gov/visn10/. Best wishes for a safe and healthy summer and a happy Fourth of July.

—John Barilich, Acting Network Director



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

Veterans' Health

VA Healthcare System
of Ohio

Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive,
Suite 200

Cincinnati, OH 45249

Veterans' Health is online at www.va.gov/visn10/. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Keep your appointments

Next time you have a doctor's appointment, be sure you keep it. Missing appointments can have a harmful effect on your health, especially for patients with chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes or asthma. To be healthy, you need to keep your scheduled appointments.

If for some reason you need to cancel, call to reschedule as soon as you can. In most cases, we can set up a new appointment within two weeks. Calling to cancel your appointment in advance allows another veteran to be seen promptly. For example, when a patient calls with an acute medical condition, we try to get them in to see the doctor the same day.

At VA Healthcare System of Ohio, we're working to improve your health. For you to do your part to stay healthy, you need to keep your appointments. **VA**

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

ON THE COVER: JOSE SALCEDO, U.S. ARMY SPECIALIST

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Easing the transition

Helping veterans readjust after returning home

For veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF), readjustment can be slow and painful. In some cases, mental health and behavioral problems may not surface until you've rejoined your family, friends and co-workers.

A new VA and Department of Defense program known as Post-Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) could make your return to civilian life easier. Within three to six months of your return, you'll be required to take part in a PDHRA screening and evaluation session run by healthcare professionals.

"It's one of the most ambitious outreach and education programs ever undertaken by the Department of Defense for veterans coming home from war," says Col. Terry Washam. Washam is a reserve social work consultant with the U.S. Army Office of Seamless Transition. "PDHRA is designed to identify mental health and behavioral concerns before they become chronic problems."

For Army Specialist Jose Salcedo, the PDHRA was an eye-opening experience. After spending a year in Baghdad, he went through the assessment after being home for 90 days. "It was really helpful," he says. "It made me realize I was dealing with some issues I hadn't recognized."

Your command will let you know when you'll be assessed. Your PDHRA will take place some time within a three- to six-month screening window during your Guard or Reserve unit weekend. You'll meet with a special healthcare team of physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

Col. Terry Washam is a reserve social work consultant with the U.S. Army Office of Seamless Transition.



Working together to keep you healthy

To help returning veterans readjust to life in the states, VA Healthcare System of Ohio is partnering with the Department of Defense for the Post-Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA). We've taken a lead role in establishing a best-practice model for providing VA and Vet Center support at PDHRA on-site screening events and provided support to the first U.S. Marine Corps unit in the nation to undergo a PDHRA.

As of April 30, approximately 800 reservists in VISN 10 completed the assessment and roughly half of them were referred for treatment. Our staff takes a one-stop shopping approach to providing information, assisting with enrollment, scheduling appointments and coordinating follow-up care.

They may decide you need follow-up care or evaluation to help deal with problems like depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, substance abuse or marital difficulties. If so, Medical Center and Vet Center staff from VA Healthcare System of Ohio will help arrange referrals.

You can also reach the PDHRA program by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You'll speak with a VA healthcare

provider who will walk you through the process. If you need more help, your call will be transferred to a local VA Medical Center or Vet Center.

A national three-month PDHRA pilot program began late last year. At the time, more than 1,200 Army reservists completed the healthcare assessment either on-site or through the Call Center. Of those screened, 678 were referred for VA Medical Center healthcare services or Vet Center behavioral health services. About 300,000 active-duty and Reserve soldiers are expected to complete the program over the next two years.

For more information about PDHRA, visit www.va.gov/visn10/. **VH**

A man and a woman are in a kitchen, preparing vegetables. The man is in the foreground, wearing a light brown button-down shirt, and is slicing cucumbers on a white cutting board. The woman is behind him, wearing a light pink sweater, and is looking down at the vegetables. On the cutting board, there are several sliced cucumbers, a pile of cherry tomatoes, and some broccoli. The background is bright and out of focus.

Prevent cancer

Tips to help you sidestep cancer

Your risk of getting cancer depends on a number of things. While you may have no control over factors like age, family history and exposure to cancer-causing compounds, you can still do things to stack the odds in your favor. Research shows smart lifestyle choices can help ward off cancer and other diseases.

Try these easy tips to stay healthy:

Watch your diet

- Cut the salt—it may lead to digestive cancers.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and veggies each day.
- Skip the grill. Meat cooked at high temperatures may contain compounds that cause stomach cancer.
- Limit alcohol to one drink a day for women and two a day for men. More will raise your risk for breast, colon and liver cancers.
- Switch to whole-grain foods rich in fiber and vitamin E.

Treat your body right

- Exercise almost every day and stay at a healthy weight.
- **Women:** Perform monthly breast self-exams.
- **Men:** examine your testicles monthly.
- Talk to your doctor about important cancer screenings.
- Know your family's history of cancers and make lifestyle changes as needed.
- If you smoke, quit.

Check your home

- Test your home for radon, a gas that causes lung cancer.
- Protect yourself when using home-repair materials that contain asbestos. Never saw, drill or tear without wearing gloves and a mask. **VH**

Smart strategies can keep you healthy



It's never too late to quit smoking

We're here to help!

Cigarette smoking causes 87 percent of lung cancer deaths. Tobacco use is responsible for most mouth, nose, vocal cord, throat and bladder cancers. Fortunately, millions of smokers have already quit, says Linda Bodie, Psy.D., program director for the substance dependence program at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center.

"Some of our veterans have smoked for 40 years and ask, 'What's the point of stopping now?'" Dr. Bodie says. "After just five years of not smoking, your risk of getting—and dying from—lung cancer is greatly reduced, your circulation is better and you'll have much more energy."

But quitting smoking is hard work: It can take six or seven tries to successfully stop smoking. If you're ready to kick the habit, VA is here to help you both physically and mentally. We offer nicotine replacement tools like patches, gum or lozenges, which studies show can double a smoker's success at quitting.

Smokers get the mental and emotional support they need to quit for good at VA smoking-cessation classes and counseling sessions. "Once you've gotten over the nicotine withdrawal, you still have to cope with habits, such as having a cigarette with your morning coffee or lighting up while you're on the phone," says Dr. Bodie. "These are usually the biggest hurdles to staying smoke-free."

That's why the smoking-cessation program teaches veterans how to stop cravings before they start. Smokers learn to replace bad habits with healthier ones, such as walking to ease stress or keeping carrot sticks handy when hand-to-mouth urges strike.

If you smoke, Dr. Bodie suggests the following tips to help you stop:

- ❶ Set a quit date and tell others.
- ❷ Get rid of all cigarettes, ashtrays and lighters.
- ❸ Invite a friend or loved one to attend a smoking-cessation class with you.
- ❹ Learn a craft or hobby to keep your hands busy and away from cigarettes.
- ❺ If drinking coffee makes you want a cigarette, have juice, water or milk instead.
- ❻ Eat healthy food, drink lots of water and exercise regularly, which will all help ease stress and withdrawal symptoms.
- ❼ Write down reasons you want to quit smoking on one side of an index card. On the other side, list the benefits you'll enjoy. Keep it nearby to refer to when you want to smoke. **VH**

6 ways to reduce your skin cancer risk

Can't wait to head outdoors this summer? Well, keep your shirt on—and your hat, sunglasses and sunscreen—because ultraviolet rays are responsible for more than 90 percent of all skin cancers.

To lower your risk, follow these tips:

- 1 Reduce your time in the sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- 2 Always wear sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or more. Apply it 15 to 30 minutes before going outside.
- 3 Don't use sun lamps or tanning beds.
- 4 Wear a hat, sunglasses, long-sleeved shirt and long pants when in the sun.
- 5 Take extra care to avoid sun exposure when taking medications.
- 6 Give yourself a head-to-toe skin exam at least once every six months and have a doctor examine your skin once a year.

Don't think you're safe because you're outside only on weekends or on vacation. Studies show that people exposed to bursts of sunlight are more likely to develop melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, than those who are outdoors regularly. And keep in mind that sun protection is a year-round affair. In fact, cancers on the head, scalp and neck—parts of the body that are exposed no matter the season—are more dangerous than those on the arms or legs.

Colorectal cancer screenings save lives

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in men and women in this country. The most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of colon or rectal cancers is to get screened regularly starting at age 50, says Miguel LaPuz, M.D., chief of staff at the Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Center in Columbus.

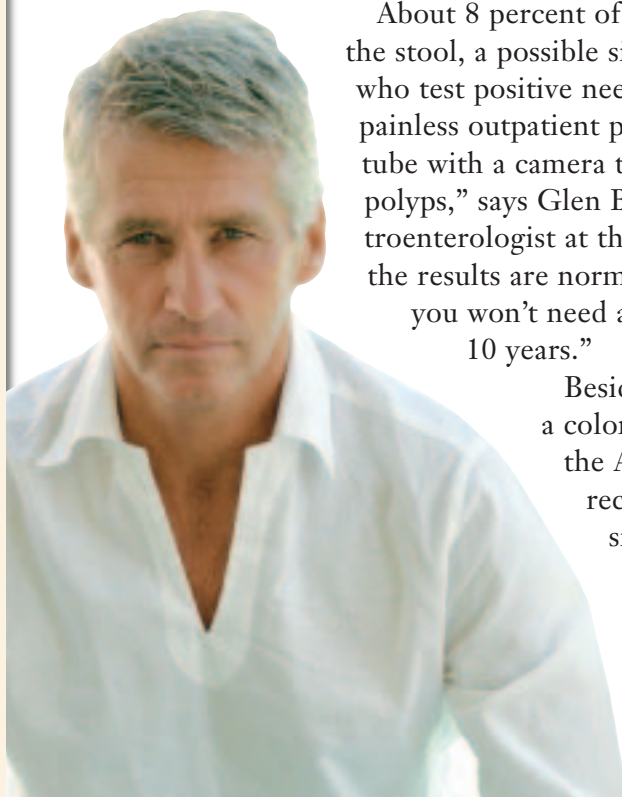
Colorectal cancer usually begins with a polyp, a small growth in the colon that can become cancerous. Finding polyps early and having them removed can prevent cancer from ever developing.

Most often, the first colorectal cancer screening is a fecal occult blood test (FOBT). This at-home test checks for hidden blood in the stool. Simply smear three small stool samples on test cards and mail them to a lab.

"Unfortunately, many vets—30 percent to 40 percent—fail to return the kit they get at their clinic visit," says Dr. LaPuz. "They may not realize how important this screening is or maybe don't want to make the effort."

About 8 percent of FOBTs reveal blood in the stool, a possible sign of cancer. "People who test positive need a colonoscopy, a painless outpatient procedure that uses a thin tube with a camera to search for and remove polyps," says Glen Borchers, M.D., a gastroenterologist at the center. "Most often, the results are normal and, once it's done, you won't need another colonoscopy for 10 years."

Besides an annual FOBT and a colonoscopy every 10 years, the American Cancer Society recommends a flexible sigmoidoscopy (a procedure to check for polyps in the lower colon) or a double-contrast barium enema every five years. **VH**





Fight breast cancer

Self-exams, mammograms and healthy living are key

This year, nearly 213,000 U.S. women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. About 41,000 women will die from it. “The most important thing a woman can do to protect herself is to know what her breasts feel like by performing monthly self-exams,” says Audricia Brooks, M.S.N., A.R.N.P., B.C. Brooks is a primary care provider and women veterans program manager at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. “We recommend women do this after every menstrual period, when breasts are less likely to be tender or lumpy. That way, you can have changes checked out as soon as possible.”

If you have a strong family history of breast cancer, you can lower your risk of the disease. “Exercise regularly, don’t drink alcohol or smoke, stay slim or lose weight if you need to,” Brooks says. “If you’re pregnant or plan to have children, try to nurse your baby for several months. And have your doctor check your breasts once a year.”

A yearly mammogram starting at age 40, or earlier if you’re at high risk for breast cancer, is a must. “The longer cancer is there, the greater the chance the cancer cells can spread,” says Brooks. “When tumors are detected early, treatment is more likely to be successful.”

And it’s not for women only. A strong family history of the disease increases a man’s risk, too. Brooks urges men to be aware of any changes in their breast tissue. If a lump or swelling appears, see your doctor right away. **VH**

The cancer screenings you need

Fear of being diagnosed with cancer is the top reason most people put off getting tested. But cancer can be cured if found early enough. The American Cancer Society recommends:

General: Men and women between ages 20 and 39 should have a cancer-related checkup every three years. Men and women ages 40 and older should have a cancer screening every year. Screenings should include counseling on preventing cancer and a physical check of the thyroid, mouth, skin, lymph nodes, testes and ovaries.

Breast: Women should have a breast exam by their doctor every three years and perform monthly self-breast exams. Women over 40 should have a yearly mammogram.

Colon and rectum: Starting at age 50, men and women should begin one of these five screenings:

- yearly fecal occult blood tests (FOBT)
- a flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- both the FOBT every year and flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- a double-contrast barium enema every five years
- a colonoscopy every 10 years

Prostate: Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in men. The PSA test and digital rectal exam should be part of men’s yearly checkups beginning at age 50. Men at high risk (African-American men and those with a father or brother who was diagnosed with prostate cancer) should begin screening at age 45.

Endometrium: Starting at age 35, women at high risk for hereditary non-polypoid colon cancer should have a yearly screening for endometrial cancer.

Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Chillicothe VAMC

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Athens

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Lancaster

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Suite 100
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta

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Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth

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Portsmouth, OH 45662
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Cincinnati VAMC

3200 Vine Street
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Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
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Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Bellevue
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Cincinnati, OH 45245
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Dearborn County

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Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

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Brecksville VA Medical Center

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Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

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Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool

332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

New Philadelphia

1260 Monroe Avenue, #15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Painesville

7 West Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Ravenna

6751 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City
1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion

1203 Delaware Avenue
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8089

Zanesville

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Dayton VAMC

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Lima
1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middletown

675 North University Boulevard
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Richmond

4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
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